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ABSTRACT

A study examined the extent to which college level forensics coaches incorporate appraisal techniques into the forensics setting. A survey, based on a review of organizational literature, was distributed to coaches at a midwestern forensics tournament. Thirty-five surveys were distributed and 17 were returned for a response rate of 48%. The survey consisted of nine close-ended questions and three open-ended questions. Survey questions measured coaches' practices and attitudes regarding three key elements of performance appraisal research: (1) a supportive climate, (2) goal setting, and (3) participative or employee-centered goal setting. Results indicated that even though some coaches are using these techniques in coaching, a greater number of coaches agree with the concepts than are actually using them. Results also showed that coaches have widely adopted strategies for generating a supportive climate. Yet taking this supportive climate to the extent of participative goal setting is not as commonly practiced. The key seems to be letting students do the talking, because only they truly know what they want out of a given activity. Participative goal setting allows coaches to find out about the goals of individual competitors. Because the students create the goals, there is insurance that the coaches are not putting their goals onto the students and making them more involved in the activity than they want to be. When the student and the coach have different expectations, frustration results. (Contains 19 references.) (TB)

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Performance Appraisal Research Applied to Forensics

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which college level forensics coaches incorporate performance appraisal techniques into the forensics setting. A survey, based on a review of organizational communication literature, was distributed to coaches at a midwestern forensics tournament. The survey questions measured coaches' practices and attitudes regarding three key elements of performance appraisal research: a supportive climate, goal setting and participative or employee-centered goal setting. The results indicate that even though some coaches are using these techniques in coaching, a greater number of coaches agree with the concepts than are actually using them. The results also show that coaches have widely adopted strategies for generating a supportive climate. Yet taking this supportive climate to the extent of participative goal setting is not as commonly practiced.

The classroom situation is only one forum for students to learn. Textbooks and class lectures do teach valuable information, but this information can be greatly enhanced outside of the classroom setting as well. A good way to find value in learning is to see the skills taught in the classroom being used in other situations. A department that can provide these experiences and make them worthwhile is successfully utilizing experiential education.

Allen Wutzdorff and Pat Hutchings (1988) furthered the idea that there are three components essential to experiential learning: goal setting, reading the environment and reflecting. I would like to focus on the final step, reflecting, and introduce an opportunity for students to utilize this step in the learning process. Reflecting allows students to think about what has been learned by the experience, not only what they have done. In the work place, performance appraisals serve this function. They provide an opportunity for workers to think about what they have learned and how they are performing as well as how they have met their supervisor's standards. The concept of performance appraisal applied to students' experiential learning may be just as effective in enabling reflection.

The form of experiential learning that I will apply performance appraisal research to is the experience of competitive forensics. Competitive forensics fits the standards of experiential learning because it acts as a laboratory for public speaking skills. In an article supplying a rationale for forensics, James H. McBath (1984) describes forensics as "an expression of scholarship and forensics activities as laboratories within which the results of student scholarship are evaluated" (p. 5).

More specifically, the range of events in forensics competition allow for the practice of skills learned in a wide range of scholarship, from interpretation of literature to logic and organization in writing. The purpose of forensics is explained by Steve Hunt (1989), "The theory is that communication classes in rhetoric and public address and oral interpretation reflect/teach theory and practice that are necessary and essential to life and that forensics individual events competition, in turn, serves as a laboratory for the theory and practice of communications classes" (p. 34).

Therefore we can utilize performance appraisal research to better fulfill the reflection element of experiential learning by applying it to the forensics laboratory experience. This paper will use previous performance appraisal research to identify areas where this research can benefit the forensics experience and show the extent to which these ideas are being used by the forensics community. Applications of this research not only include the activity of forensics, but can extend to other types of experiential learning as well.

Research into performance appraisals typically centers around the work environment. Performance appraisals are usually looked at from the standpoint of employer/employee relations and how appraisal of an employee can maximize that employee's performance on the job. However, the same techniques that have been shown to be effective in the work place may also be applied to other performance situations; namely coaching competitive forensics.

In many ways, the relationship of a coach to a student is similar to the employer/employee relationship. One party has the power and expertise in the

situation, and he or she wants to show the other party how to be successful. In doing this, the employee/student performs and is appraised on that performance, then suggestions are given to improve future performance. The correlation between the two situations is strong; suggesting that forensic coaches may learn from performance appraisal research.

This study raises the question, "To what extent do college forensic coaches incorporate performance appraisal techniques into the forensic setting?"

Performance appraisal research is summarized and focused into the areas of a supportive climate, goal setting and participative goal setting, with implications drawn for the use of these techniques in forensic coaching.

It has long been known that supportive relationships between the evaluator and the one being evaluated are vital to successful performance appraisal. Likert (1967) found that performance appraisals have a more positive effect on the subordinate's performance in the work place when a supervisor is perceived as supportive by the subordinate. Latham and Saari further supported these findings (1979). Since these earlier studies, additional research has questioned why this is so and asked how these supportive relationships can be best utilized.

A supportive relationship can first be developed in the way an evaluator approaches a performance appraisal. Three main types of interview styles are common: the tell and sell method, the tell and listen method, and the problem solving method (Wilson & Goodall, 1991). In the tell and sell method, the evaluators take almost all of the responsibility for the appraisal. They decide on the

best appraisal and then sell their ideas for improvement to the subordinate. With the tell and listen method, the evaluator tells the subordinate what he or she thinks is a fair appraisal, and then listens to the subordinate's point of view. This way any negative feelings on the part of the employee can be released. The problem solving approach, however, relies on equal participation between employer and subordinate. In this method, the employee evaluates his or her own performance, and the employer listens and summarizes thoughts and problems as well as reflects his or her own opinions of the employee's appraisal. In this way they work together in order to solve specific problems that may arise rather than having one party simply evaluate the other.

Dugan (1989) argues that because the problem solving approach involves employees, it is very effective in creating a successful performance appraisal. Participation helps create a supportive climate because it reduces the equivocality or uncertainty on the part of the employee, allowing for a relaxed atmosphere contributing to better communication. "Humans in organizations need to process information collectively in order to reduce the information uncertainty they face in their activity" (Swanson, 1992, p. 68). The problem solving method allows for this collective processing of information.

This method also creates a result that is more likely to be accepted by both parties. Subordinates often dislike performance appraisals because they feel that they do not have an opportunity to express themselves and because they feel they are unfairly appraised (Kirkpatrick, 1986). In the problem solving method, subordinates

can express themselves and are unlikely to feel unfairly appraised because they appraise themselves. As Erhart (1976) states, "The common problem of resistance to change is nonexistent, because a person not only approves but accepts his or her own conclusion" (p. 240). Better communication leads to more support for the appraisal from the employee's point of view.

In the experience of forensics, the tell and sell method seems to be used frequently. Students perform for coaches and then are often told what they did wrong or right. However, the same support for the problem solving approach may be valuable here also. Instead of the coach bringing up things that need to be changed, there may be a way to let the student do the talking. They can start by telling what they feel is right or wrong about their performance. Coaches can listen and evaluate, adding their own expertise to help students solve problems that they have observed.

Speech critiques from tournament judges can serve as a tool for students to evaluate their own performance. Once students have recognized and accepted problems or concerns, the coach can work to solve them. This would enable students to take a more active role in the appraisal and create a more supportive climate.

A second area of performance appraisal that can be applied to forensics is the use of goal setting. Research has shown that setting goals is crucial in performance appraisal because it improves attitudes and leads to increased performance (Ivancevich, 1982; Latham & Locke, 1979; Latham & Yukl, 1976; Locke & Latham,

1984; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). The use of goals gives the worker something to strive for before the next meeting.

Specific goals allow for more goal clarity, acceptance and commitment (Tziner & Kopelman, 1988 & Tziner, Kopelman, & Livnech, 1993). Behavior observation scales (BOS) are one method of evaluation that pinpoint the specific desired and undesired actions to be taken or avoided (Latham & Wexley, 1981). These scales have been shown to be the best evaluation tool for setting goals that are specific (Tziner et al., 1993), because they focus on specific behaviors rather than evaluating overall performance. Tziner & Kopelman (1988) and Tziner et al. (1993) found that performance improved significantly using this BOS process because of the advantages of specific goals.

Goals also need to be difficult to achieve. Latham and Saari (1979) found that high goals result in higher performance than easy goals. When the goals are too easy, their achievement does little to enhance performance. When all of these principles are applied, goals become an essential part of the performance appraisal process.

In forensics, the aspects of goal setting can also be applied. Instead of simply giving suggestions and solving problems in a coaching session, coaches can help students set goals for upcoming meetings and tournaments. When competitors have a specific task to work on, it can make their practice time much more productive. As Wutzdorff and Hutchings (1988) explain, "the goal-setting process . . . becomes a key element in reflection. A student who has internalized a concrete set

of goals can use them as an ongoing measure of her performance' (p. 66). The goal-setting process is essential for the reflective experiential learning that forensics provides.

Goal setting can accomplish the same results here as with traditional performance appraisals in the work place, as long as they meet the same guidelines and are based on specific performance aspects and are fairly difficult to achieve. Therefore the students have to put in work to accomplish them.

The next step in performance appraisal is to combine the aspects of a supportive climate and goal setting into what can be described as participative goal setting. In this model, the goals are jointly developed in a supportive climate so that the goals are accepted by both parties. Tjosvold and Halco (1992) found that "Cooperative goals appear to induce positive expectations, the open and constructive discussion of views, and quality feedback, which in turn are related to motivation and confidence in future collaboration" (p. 637). Participative goal setting not only provides for acceptance of goals, but allows for a higher probability of the accomplishment of those goals.

Participative goal setting also helps in the process of setting difficult goals, which increase levels of performance. Latham and Saari (1979) found that supportive behavior by the manager leads to the setting of hard goals, and participation leads to an understanding of how they can be attained.

In forensics, participative goal setting may be the key to successful coaching. These goals could lay a framework for student practice and give the students a

climate in which they can actively participate in the planning of their competitive future. The role of participative goal setting in developing difficult goals that are accepted by the students may be of help to coaches in motivating their competitors.

Method

The data for this study was obtained from a survey distributed at a midwestern university's collegiate tournament, including seventeen schools representing five states, in the fall of 1994. The surveys were distributed to forensic coaches and graduate coaches at the tournament. Thirty-five surveys were distributed and seventeen were returned for a response rate of 48.6%. The identity of respondents was kept confidential, however, they were asked to indicate their gender and years of coaching experience.

The survey consisted of nine closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions. The questions dealt with the three areas of performance appraisal discussed above: supportive climate, goal setting and participative goal setting. Eight of the close ended questions asked the coaches to respond to a statement by circling always, sometimes, rarely, never, or unsure. The final question used the wording of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or unsure. The responses were weighted by giving four points for always or strongly agree, three for sometimes or agree, two for rarely or disagree, one for never or strongly disagree, and the unsure responses were isolated and not used in calculations. The mean was calculated for each question.

For the three open-ended questions, clusters of responses were determined

based on the three areas of performance appraisal discussed earlier. An operational definition was formulated for each cluster and the responses were analyzed and categorized according to the definitions. If a comment mentioned subjects relevant to more than one category, it was coded into each of the appropriate categories. If a single respondent gave more than one comment in the same category, only the first comment was recorded.

Results

Questions number one, two and seven dealt with the idea of using the problem solving method of evaluation in coaching sessions. The results are shown in table 1.

Table 1	
Mean of Scores for Problem Solving Questions	
Question	Mean
1. When coaching students, I allow them to come up with their own appraisal of their performance.	3.59
2. In coaching sessions with students, I do most of the talking.	2.82
7. Students I coach disagree with me when I point out problems in their performance.	2.82
Always =4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2, Never=1	

These results show that the problem solving method of appraisal is being used by coaches. This is evident by the high score for coaches allowing students to appraise themselves. Coaches also seemed to feel that most of the time students did

most of the talking in coaching sessions, as is evident by the score of 2.82 for question two. This is another aspect of the problem-solving approach. As a result of this approach, students should agree with the appraisal outcomes. As we can see by the results of question seven, coaches do feel that students are agreeing with the appraisals they receive.

Table 2	
Mean of Scores for Goal Setting Questions	
Question	Mean
3. My students come out of a coaching session with goals to accomplish before the next session.	3.41
4. My students set goals that require effort outside of coaching sessions.	3.53
5. The goals developed in coaching sessions relate to specific changes in students' written work and/or performance.	3.29
Always =4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2, Never=1	

Table 2 shows the results of questions related to goal-setting. The mean of question number three shows that goals are being used to a large extent in coaching sessions. Question number four is meant to measure the level to which the goals created are difficult to achieve, which increases their chance of being accomplished. This score was very high, indicating that coaches do push students toward goals that require extra effort. The level to which goals set are specific is measured by question number five. The mean of this question is not as high as the other two. It shows

that coaches do set specific goals, but in many situations only general goals are set.

Table 3

Mean of Scores for Participative Goal Setting Questions

Question	Mean
6. My students set their own goals in practice sessions.	2.82
8. Students don't interpret the goals that we've developed in coaching sessions in the same way I do.	2.47
9. I feel that students are more likely to improve performance if they set their own standards.	3.38

Numbers six and eight: Always =4, Sometimes=3, Rarely=2, Never=1

Number nine: Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1

Table three displays results for questions which measured the level of participative goal setting used by the coaches. Question six has a fairly low score, falling between rarely and sometimes. But surprisingly, the score of question eight shows that coaches still feel that the students understand the goals developed. This is surprising because participative goal setting increases likelihood that goals will be understood by students.

Even though coaches are not using participative goal setting often, the result of question nine shows that they still feel that using this method would be more effective. Their actions do not reflect their feelings on this method of goal-setting.

Open-ended Questions

There were three open-ended questions asked on the survey:

1. What role does goal setting play in your individual coaching sessions?
2. What strategies do you use to give students the opportunity to assess their own performance?
3. How would you recommend that new coaches implement a student-centered approach to coaching sessions?

The responses were coded into six categories.

Problem Solving. Any comment that mentioned an aspect of the problem-solving approach to performance appraisal as a positive coaching tool.

Goal Setting. Any comment that referred to goal-setting as a positive device in coaching sessions.

General Goal Setting. Any positive comment that mentioned setting goals which are broad and general.

Specific Goal Setting. Any positive mention of setting goals which are specific and refer to specific changes in students' written work or performance.

Participative Goal Setting. Any positive reference to goals which are set jointly with the student or entirely by the student.

Other. The mention of effective coaching techniques which do not fall into categories of student participation or goal-setting.

There were a total of 52 comments coded. Some of the comments were coded into more than one category; especially comments about goal setting which often were coded under goal setting and specific or general goal setting. However many of the goal setting comments did not refer to one specific type and were only coded under

the goal setting category.

Table 4

Summary of Comments by Category

	# of comments	% of N*
Problem Solving	16	31%
Goal Setting	14	27%
General Goal Setting	7	13%
Specific Goal Setting	6	12%
Participative Goal-Setting	10	19%
Other	9	17%
*N = 52		

As indicated in table 4, the most common type of comment related to the problem solving approach to performance appraisal. By their comments, coaches seem to see the benefits of this type of coaching session and use it to their benefit. For example, "I frequently ask after a practice performance - very general questions well, what do you think?" One coach applies this type of evaluation to peer critique sessions. "Sit in on sessions to help guide, but let the students do the majority of the critique-type talk." However one problem with this approach was brought up. "After the first performance of the session, I always ask what they thought about

their performance. Sometimes they don't know."

There were also many comments relating to goal setting. Some of the comments were very general such as "I always determine two main goals for students to work on." Other comments specifically referred to goals that were very general or goals that were very specific. As Table 4 shows, these two types of goals were mentioned about an equal amount. Even though specific goals are more often attained, coaches use both types of goals in their coaching sessions, and some even found more value in general goal setting. "In terms of overall goal setting, I do more in terms of long-range goals for an individual vs. specific goals for an event."

One interesting comment found reason to discourage goal setting in some cases. "Depends on the student, some students react to goals better than others do. I think that coaching for objectives is good but there are other students that this hindered." Another coaches had trouble incorporating goal setting at all.

Participative goal setting wasn't mentioned as often as nonparticipative goal setting. However, some coaches did find it very useful. "Writing down the goal/outcome and keeping track of progress makes it easier for students to track and develop own goals for next session or next event." The idea of participative goal-setting was described well by one comment, "don't put your goals onto your students. Ask lots of questions and find out what they want to accomplish and help them to work towards that."

The last category on Table 4 refers to other suggestions that coaches gave for effective coaching. These included the use of videotape, peer coaching sessions,

ballot analysis, sessions individualized for the performer, and repeating performances in practice sessions.

Discussion

This survey did indicate that performance appraisal techniques, shown to be effective in the work place, are being used by forensic coaches to coach students. Coaches are already noticing the benefits of incorporating performance appraisal techniques into their coaching. Yet even more of this can be done. Coaches seem to be widely accepting and using the idea of generating a supportive climate, yet taking this climate to the extent of participative goal setting isn't as widely used.

The key seems to be in letting students do the talking, because only they truly know what they want out of the activity. In this way forensics is different from the job setting. In a job context, an employee is expected to meet certain standards. In most forensics programs, the standards are determined by the individual students. The activity is there to help them meet whatever goals they have. Participative goal setting allows coaches to find out about the goals of individual competitors. Because the students create the goals, there is insurance that the coach is not putting their goals onto the students and making them more involved in the activity than they want to be. When the student and coach have different expectations from the activity, frustration results for both parties.

The fact that coaches feel that participative goal setting is important is a step in the right direction. However, the results also showed that their use of the technique is not in line with their feelings about it. This indicates that coaches

sometimes know about superior coaching techniques, but have trouble implementing them. As one coach noted, "Perhaps it is more effective to help students determine their own goals. As a new coach, I realize I don't often do this -- I tend to be more directive of students. I'm not sure this is very effective." Here is a case where more experienced coaches can help the new coaches implement some effective coaching techniques.

Even though the research shows that specific goals, such as rewriting an introduction, allow for more goal clarity and achievement, coaches seem to be letting their students set general goals, such as qualifying for nationals, just as often. But as long as specific goals are also being set, the general goals may act as an effective supplement to the day to day goals. Using both types of goals may utilize the effectiveness of both approaches, as long as specific goals are not reduced in order implement general goals.

Some coaches mentioned that the answers to their questions depended highly on the level of experience of each individual competitor. They gave the more experienced performers more of a chance to appraise themselves, while giving more direction to the less experienced competitors. One coach commented that sometimes when he asks students how they did, they reply that they don't know. These students would need more direction in coaching than the students who can effectively assess their performance. This survey did not allow for this difference in judging style, which is a topic for a possible future study. It also may be interesting to look at this type of coaching from a student's perspective. Do students want such

an active role in the coaching process and do they view their participation as vital to success? It may be that students view the coaching process differently from their coaches.

This study has shown that performance appraisal research can effectively be applied to the experiential learning context of forensics. It enables coaches to better utilize their coaching sessions as the reflection step in experiential education. Instead of using forensics as a way to earn trophies and admiration, students can also use the forensics setting to apply and extend the knowledge gained in the classroom.

These results also help enforce the importance of reflection in any experiential learning situation as well as the role performance appraisal research can have in that reflection. The concepts developed in performance appraisal research, while highly applicable to forensics, can be used for any outside learning experience. The concepts of a supportive climate, goal setting and participative goal setting can enhance the reflection of any experience which fills an educative goal.

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